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HM COURTS SERVICE ESTATES

I am writing to let you know that tomorrow I will make a Written Ministerial Statement on the closure of a number of Magistrates' courts following a full public consultation.

Sleaford Magistrates' Court is included in this list, as no cases have been listed there since April 2008, and before that it experienced very low listing levels. The decision to stop listing was a local decision made by the judiciary, local Magistrates and staff, due to the low levels of work and because the court does not provide the modern facilities that your constituents including victims and witnesses rightly expect.

Cases previously heard in Sleaford have been relocated to Grantham Magistrates' Court, which provides superior facilities for users, including separate facilities and entrances for victims and witnesses, and disabled access. I am aware that there are recognised difficulties with transport links in Lincolnshire, however, Grantham does have comparatively good public transport links, and we have heard of no reported disruption to court users since the relocation of cases.

HMCS is continually reviewing the use of its estate to determine how it can best ensure that everyone has access to justice and that justice is provided locally. We need to ensure that we have a modern court estate that is properly aligned to where services are needed; that the estate is efficiently utilised; and that courts have the necessary facilities for victims and witnesses and to allow proper access for court users with disabilities.

The consultation paper covered five small Magistrates' courts in Lincolnshire: Bourne, Stamford, Louth, Gainsborough and Sleaford. You may be interested to know that the consultation paper received 26 responses, of which fourteen were clearly in favour, two had objections, and the remainder neither supported nor opposed the proposals. A copy of the response paper will be placed in the libraries of both Houses and on the Ministry of Justice website.

Taking into account all responses, and the cost to the taxpayer of bringing the building up to the required standard, I believe that it remains the best option to close the court.

Yours
Jack

JACK STRAW